

“...I must say good-bye to you...” ©

A grass-covered mound, a yellow chrysanthemum. Section 14 of Rosehill Cemetery in North Chicago. There, beside his father Charles, his mother Minnie and his younger brother Chester, lies at rest the man who was President of the Olympic development: Avery Brundage.

He died on 8th May 1975 at 87 1/2 years of age, smitten by a heart-attack resulting from a bad dose of 'flu. Struck down like an oak tree. A wonderfully preserved athlete, we thought this well-cut rock would see his centenary through.

He suffered a severe shock, there can be no doubt, when his wife Elizabeth Dunlap passed away in 1971, after 43 years of happy marriage. She had been able to understand the solitude and rigour of this dominating, conquering figure, obsessed by action. Blows? He received them throughout his long life. Nothing, however, could be compared with the emptiness he experienced when, in 1972, he had to separate himself from his one love: the Olympic movement. It was he who invented and gave substance to this expression “Olympic Movement”, just as Coubertin had with the word “Olympism”. Often challenged, this term defined the active alliance of the many components of the international organisation of pure sport.

His life? He had startling successes in many fields, but it was to sport that he was pledged.

Born at Detroit (Michigan) on 28th September 1887, his family was comfortably-off but with no real fortune. He soon came to Chicago where he was to a large extent raised by his aunts. “I was the pet of the family”, he said. At the Illinois University at Urbana, he obtained a civil engineering diploma with credit from his examiners.

Most of his leisure time was already devoted to the stadium. He was drawn

by all branches of athletics. He excelled in handball. The young man wanted to be both animator and leader. Editor of the University magazine, he was at the same time the students' spokesman to the masters.

A good 6 ft tall, square-shouldered, with legs of a weightlifter set on his large feet, Avery Brundage was the prototype of an all-around player. This was a typically-American sport similar to the decathlon, but much more exhausting since the ten events take place on the same day.

Just upon leaving University, he was selected for the Games of the Vth Olympiad at Stockholm in 1912. He came 6th in the decathlon. He went on to win many victories: three United States all-around champion titles and numerous medals in other disciplines. He had long been saving to see Europe when his selection for the Olympic Games gave him the chance to visit the old continent, which he furrowed his way through for six months, passing through Tzarist Russia, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and France. These were the only long holidays he was to allow himself, and his mother, to whom he was fondly attached, was invited to share part of them with him.



Returning to Chicago, he set up The Avery Brundage Company which was to construct dozens of sky-scrapers and a number of important buildings in Chicago and across the entire United States. He was a millionaire. He married. Two years later, on 24th October 1929, the collapse of Wall Street left him in ruin. The Chicago engineer went back to the work sites and recovered his financial power. He went through another black period following the IInd World War, and had to scrape the bottom of the barrel. But his workers had confidence in such a fighter, such a leader of men. He took on the work of both architects and superintendents on the sites. He covered the orders. He built up a new fortune. He was 60 years old.

Even before winning his last athlete's medal in 1920, he considered himself a leader at heart. He felt that each sports official should have been a participant in the true sense of the word. He became in turn member then Vice-President of the International Athletics Federation, member of the Board of the International Handball Federation, President of the Amateur Athletic Union and in the same year, 1928, President of the United States Olympic Committee, where he remained until 1952, when he acceded to the supreme magistracy of amateur sport.

The Games of the XIth Olympiad caused uproar, starting in 1935. Avery Brundage boldly assumed his responsibilities. He wished to see the athletes of his country march into the "Olympiastadion" on 1st August 1936. His fellow-countryman, Jahncke, then member of the IOC, campaigned against sending a delegation of American youth to Nazi and racist Germany. As President of the USOC, Avery Brundage called upon public opinion, harmonised press campaigns and increased interferences. Finally, 384 athletes set off for Europe on the SS Manhattan to defend the Stars and Stripes on Swastika country. Mr. Jahncke clashed

with his international counterparts and was obliged to give notice of his resignation. Avery Brundage was coopted to the IOC in his place.

While the IInd World War ravaged Europe, he was, along with Lindbergh, one of the founder members of the famous "Citizens keep America out of war Committee", which, with the Berlin precedent labelled him forever. However, the later President of the IOC was essentially a true American at heart. In 1940, he put the Pan American Sports Organisation (ODEPA) on its feet, a body with very separatist tendencies but on the same grand scale as the three Americas it encompassed. He was immediately elected its President. He held this post for twelve years.

Avery Brundage was often criticised for his clerical bearing, his austerity, his authoritative manner, his stubbornness, his secrets. Much of this was facade. He could be an astute diplomat. Did he not engineer the entry of socialist countries into the IOC, the swift return of the Japanese and the Germans to Olympic competitions? A highly risky game.

He had always had a longing for adventure and travel, and would boast: "I have a marvellous villa at Santa Barbara, a hotel and apartment in Chicago, but I live in an aeroplane." He enjoyed luxury, beauty and feminine company. Here was an aesthete and a shrewd connoisseur. Then there was art—the only passion which for him could rival that for Olympic sport.

There was something of Don Quixote in Avery Brundage. A huge wrought-iron statue of the Cervantes Heroes dominated the hall of his little palace at Santa Barbara, one of the rare pieces which escaped the fire which ravaged the previous property of the self-styled millionaire, which had been nearby. An expert of Far Eastern and Oriental Art, he built up little by little doubtlessly the most beautiful private collection

in the world. He donated this to San Francisco.

The President of the IOC could not imagine the solitude into which he was suddenly to be plunged when he handed over the keys of Olympic power to his successor, Lord Killanin. He travelled, "killed time", as he would say, saw his Japanese and German friends, who were always among the closest he had. Frederick Ruegsegger, Vice-President of The Avery Brundage Company, continued to serve him with the loyalty and devotion which came from 25 years of mutual confidence. Finally, in July 1973, Avery Brundage married a Prussian princess, Marianne Reuss. In her company, he embarked on cruises and trips at an exhausting pace.

Only once, in April 1972, did the rock give signs of crumbling, when he said his last good-byes to the International Federations. Grasping the table behind which he was seated, with his two powerful and beautiful artist's hands, he uttered in a broken voice, "this is the last time that I have presided over this meeting; I must say good-bye to you...". A thunderous applause rang out for some minutes. The President of the IOC took off his round, steel-rimmed glasses, wiped the thick lenses which were misted, rose from his seat and left the room like a robot.

Twelve days before saying farewell to the world, he stated in a television interview, "I am always free for consultation", but no one turned any longer to him. He was left respectfully enveloped in his legend, and one preferred to think he was happy and peaceful. This extraordinary builder had made the Olympic Games, according to one of his favourite expressions, "the greatest social force of our time". A continuous and relentless realisation with much desired consequences, in spite of his polite words of warning against gigantism. An influential advancement which, without speaking of



Cortina d'Ampezzo, Squaw Valley, Grenoble and Sapporo, was capped by Rome, Tokyo, Mexico and finally Munich, unceasingly more grandiose. He wished to conserve the purity of the Games like a bride her virginity. He did not expect to meddle with purity, with "the love of sport for sport's sake", as a completely gratuitous gesture, without tempting profits.

"The times have changed and will change again", he said, "but the Olympic ideal must remain untouchable". His willful power was evident when on 6th September 1972, following the attack against the Israelis in the Olympic Village, he declared with a pounding, grave and nasal voice, "the Games must go on", and kept the magnificent Olympic ship on an even keel.

Avery Brundage never sailed off-course. Dear Mr. Brundage, so faithful to your true friends, so firm in your convictions, you, who with great heart and dignity, brought in a harvest of unforgettable achievements, will remain one of the pillars not only of the legend of sport, but of the history of man itself.

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